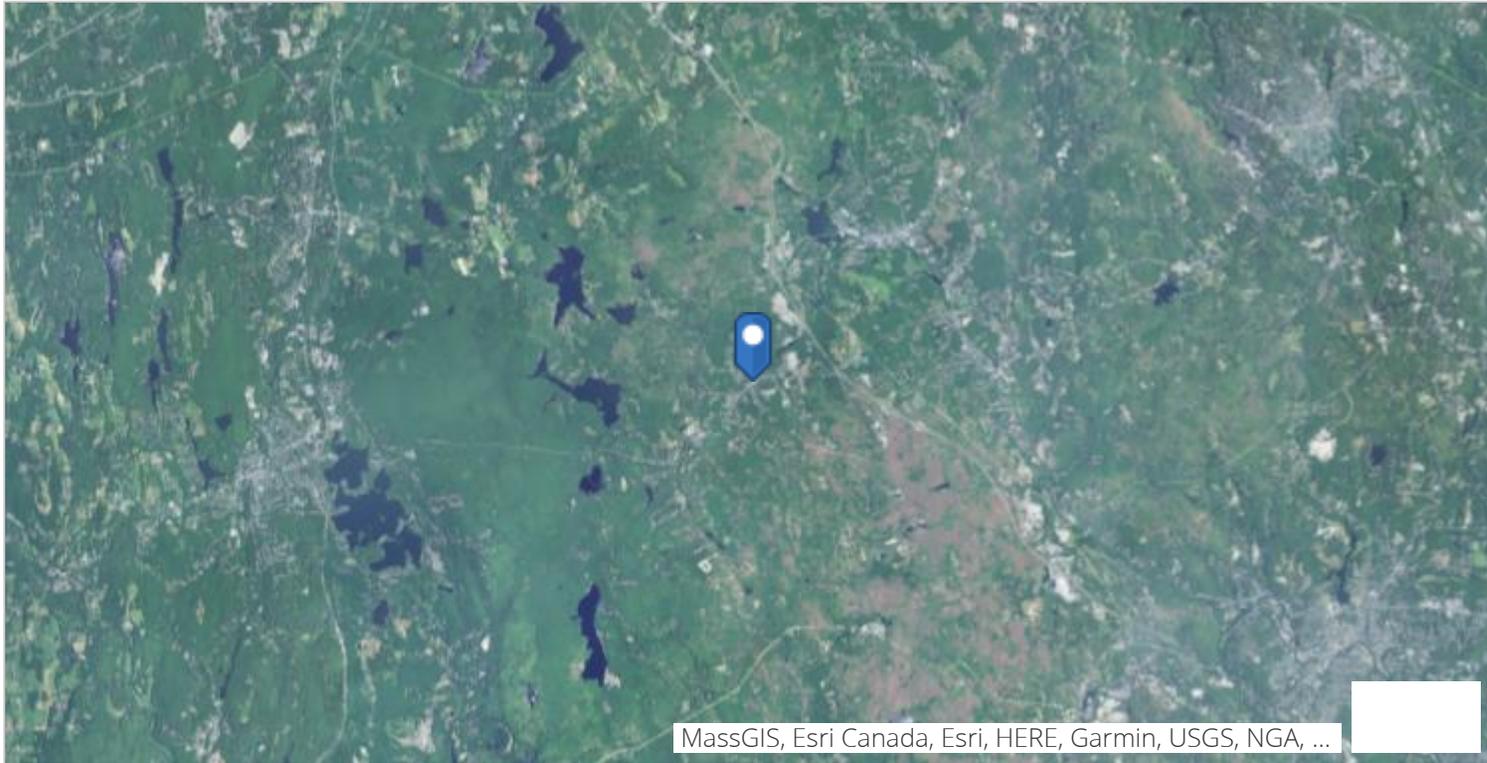


This story was made with [Esri's Story Map Cascade](#).

Read it on the web at <https://arcg.is/0KuqiK>.



20 Year Vision



A plan for Douglas to encourage economic development while preserving the Town's character



A bedroom community that is fun, safe, friendly, convenient and more developed

A place in which families want to spend time and people want to retire

A walkable downtown with a variety of dining, entertainment and social/cultural amenities

A resurgence of regional economic power while retaining natural beauty

A way to capitalize on State Forest and other natural and cultural resources

A school system where students that are well-educated in schools with a reputation for quality

Project Background

In 2017, the Town of Douglas entered into a Community Compact commitment with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Baker-Polito Administration to Create an Economic Development Plan that engages diverse stakeholders, leverages local and regional economic strengths and assets, encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, and/or promotes workforce development planning and implementation. With limited funding available to pursue this objective, the Town worked with the [Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission](#) (CMRPC) to design and implement a 3-phase planning initiative using District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) funding.

Page | 1

	Janet A. Pierce	Executive Director
	Chris J. Ryan	Community Development
	Sujatha Krishnan	Transportation
	Trish Settles	Municipal Collaboration
	Dianna Provencher	Business Manager

DOUGLAS ECONOMIC ASSET INVENTORY

PROJECT SUMMARY MEMO
RON BARRON, ASSOCIATE PLANNER, CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

2 Washington Square - Union Station
Worcester, MA 01604 - 4016

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Phase I of the initiative focused on the creation of an asset inventory and an economic snapshot of the Town. An asset inventory is a key step in asset-based economic development, which approaches economic development from a “bottom up,” community-driven approach that focuses on knowledge of, utilization of, and strategic marketing of existing assets in a community to positively impact its economy. CMRPC worked with the Town to examine six (6) dimensions of community assets. These included:

- Commercial and industrial properties;
- Downtown redevelopment and streetscapes;

- Transportation;
- Utility infrastructure;
- Historic properties; and
- Parks, gardens, and other physical assets.

Douglas Economic Development Strategic Plan- Phase II Report

Prepared by
Central Massachusetts
Regional Planning Commission

In 2018, the Douglas Economic Development Commission worked with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) to identify the economic priorities of Douglas residents. The feedback provided by residents will help guide the Town and EDC as they work to increase economic activity in Douglas through implementation of a strategic plan. Phase II of a three-phase project, the initiative builds upon previous work such as an asset inventory and preliminary economic analysis.

Phase II Report

[Phase II](#) of the initiative focused on community engagement and an analysis of constraints. CMRPC worked with the Douglas Economic Development Commission (EDC) to facilitate a community engagement process. Three (3) events were held in fall 2018, including a community visioning event, a commercial stakeholders' forum, and a municipal focus

group. At the community visioning event, residents were queried as to the kinds of development they desire, the important assets the Town should leverage to attract new businesses, and their long-term vision for the Town.

The second forum (also open to residents) was designed to solicit feedback from business owners and developers. Local business owners were queried as to challenges they face doing business in Douglas, resources that would support commercial and industrial development, and opportunities for improved processes and services.

The third event was designed to solicit feedback from municipal staff on Town processes. Municipal employees were queried as to constraints impacting economic development; the ease of doing business in Douglas; Downtown and outdoor tourism; and other topics.

With residents' economic vision for the community identified, and insight into the process of doing business detailed, CMRPC completed a constraints analysis. This analysis complements the visioning process by examining the friction points between town regulations/ processes and economic growth. The constraints analysis examines:

- Office, industrial, and retail real estate markets;
- Retail supply, demand, and leakage;
- Sports and leisure markets;
- Business zoning;
- Permitting and enforcement; and
- Other town processes;

The following report summarizes Phase I & II activities and establishes steps for Implementation of the Plan. The Town opted for a digital plan in order to reach a broader audience and increase public engagement. [Click here](#) for a printable implementation matrix that serves as a summary of this report.





Community Profile

The Town of Douglas is located in the heart of the Blackstone River Valley. Located in southern Worcester county, the Town borders Connecticut and Rhode Island on the south, Webster on the west, Uxbridge on the east, and Sutton and Oxford on the north. Douglas is home to 8,471 residents who represent 3,000 households (U.S. Census Bureaus, 2010 Census). The majority (95%) of Douglas residents are white, leaving only a small segment of the population that makes up other races. Less than two percent (1.6) of the population is Hispanic or Latino and less than half of a percent (0.4%) of the population is black or African American. There are slightly more than three-thousand housing units in Douglas (3,293) of which over ninety percent (91%) are occupied. The Town has a total area of 37.7 square miles. The majority of this area is land (36.4 acres), while only a small portion (1.3 square miles) is water.



Douglas, then known as New Sherbourne, was first settled by English migrants in the early 1700s. These early settlers relied on fertile farm lands in the eastern and southern portions of Town to drive the local economy. By the late 1700s, Douglas began to develop into an industrial village. Similar to the fertile soils that spurred initial settlement and farming, Douglas' natural landscape catalyzed the development and production of mills. Major mills in Town included an axe factory, a fulling mill, and a carding and woolen mill. Today, Douglas' previous position as an industrial manufacturer and agricultural base has given way to a vast amount of woodlands. Douglas State Forest, which spans 5,907 acres, is an example of this transition.



Population Trends

Between 2010 and 2015, the population of the town of Douglas is estimated to have grown by about 1.8%, according to the U.S. census bureau (U.S. Census, 2010, American Community Survey 2011 – 2015). Table 1 shows how this trend compares with Douglas' neighbors. In the 11 towns located in CMRPC's southeast sub-region, only three towns have demonstrated a faster growth rate over this period. Between 2000 and 2010, Douglas' population grew by more than 20% compared to an average of around 12% for the rest of the sub-region.

Municipality	Population			Change in Population	Percent Change in Population		
	2000	2010	2015	2000-2015	2000-2010	2010-2015	2000-2015
Blackstone	8,804	9,026	9,078	274	2.52%	0.58%	3.11%
Douglas	7,045	8,471	8,624	1,579	20.24%	1.81%	22.41%
Grafton	14,894	17,765	18,219	3,325	19.28%	2.56%	22.32%
Hopedale	5,907	5,911	5,942	35	0.07%	0.52%	0.59%
Mendon	5,286	5,839	5,938	652	10.46%	1.70%	12.33%
Millbury	12,784	13,261	13,391	607	3.73%	0.98%	4.75%
Millville	2,724	3,190	3,208	484	17.11%	0.56%	17.77%
Northbridge	13,182	15,707	16,268	3,086	19.15%	3.57%	23.41%
Sutton	8,250	8,963	9,141	891	8.64%	1.99%	10.80%
Upton	5,642	7,542	7,674	2,032	33.68%	1.75%	36.02%

Table 1 Population by Municipality, Southeast Sub-region, US. Census Bureau, Census 2000, 2010, ACS 2011-2015

Population Projections

Population projections developed by CMRPC show the Town is expected to reach close to 10,000 residents by 2040. This growth rate (around 5% per decade on average) is close to the median for the southeast sub-region. Figure 1 shows the population change in absolute terms and includes projections by decade. While these projections are based on trends from the latest ACS estimates (2015), they are subject to unforeseen variability. Major economic shifts, market trends and other forces will ultimately determine the actual growth observed.

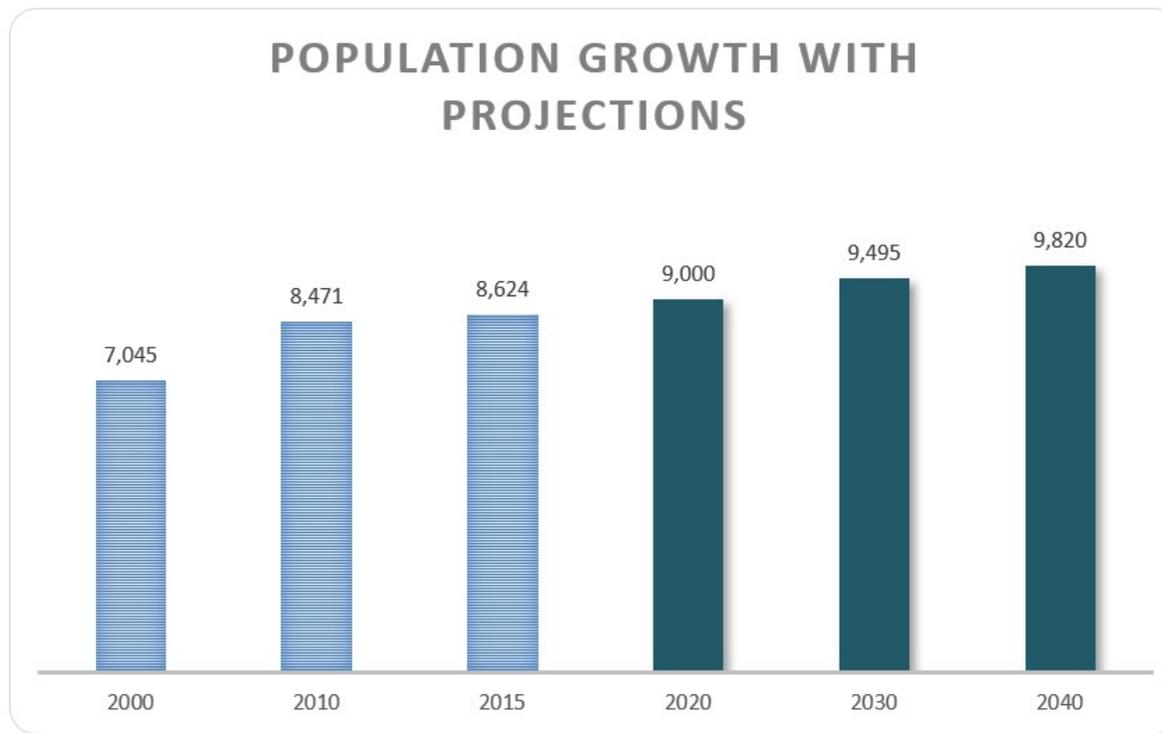


Figure 1 - Population Growth with Projections, 2000 - 2040, U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, 2010; ACS, 2011-15; CMRPC, 2016 Population Projections

Median Household Income

Table 2 shows that median household incomes contracted slightly between 2010 and 2015. The ACS estimates the median household income dropped from \$86,214 to \$85,313. This median-household income figure is about \$5,000 below the \$90,289 average for the rest of the sub-region. It should be noted, however, that median-household income in this sub-region tends to be higher than the Statewide median household income. In 2015, median household income in the State of Massachusetts was estimated to be \$67,846. No towns in the sub-region reported an income below this figure.

Municipality	Median Household Income		
	2010	2015	% Change
Blackstone	\$71,875	\$73,679	2.50%
Douglas	\$86,214	\$85,313	-1.00%
Grafton	\$91,743	\$88,712	-3.30%
Hopedale	\$97,227	\$95,268	-2.00%
Mendon	\$102,625	\$108,942	6.20%
Millbury	\$67,448	\$71,151	5.50%
Millville	\$77,250	\$81,438	5.40%
Northbridge	\$68,016	\$72,550	6.70%
Sutton	\$105,164	\$108,615	3.30%
Upton	\$107,950	\$112,917	4.60%
Uxbridge	\$81,127	\$89,703	10.60%

Table 2 - Median Household Income by municipality, CEDS 2016; US Census Bureau, Census 2000, 2010; ACS, 2011-2015

Employment

Employment in Douglas has recovered well from the low point during the Great Recession from 2007 to 2009. However, unemployment in Douglas has been shrinking steadily since 2010. Table 3 illustrates a sharp drop from a high of around 8% to a low of 3.7%. However, this rate is slightly higher than the sub-regional rate for the same period. It

should be noted that these rates, which come from the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, Department Economic Research, are not seasonally adjusted and so may vary slightly from other data sources.

	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Area Rate	Massachusetts Rate
2016	5,058	4,892	166	3.30%	3.70%
2015	5,057	4,841	216	4.30%	4.90%
2014	5,039	4,789	250	5.00%	5.80%
2013	4,969	4,676	293	5.90%	6.70%
2012	4,944	4,641	303	6.10%	6.70%
2011	4,927	4,598	329	6.70%	7.30%
2010	4,909	4,541	368	7.50%	8.30%

Table 3 - Douglas Unemployment Rate, 2010 - 2016, Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance, Department Economic Research

Data from the American Community Survey estimates that Educational Services, Health Care and Social Services are among the strongest employment clusters in the town. These occupations represent more than 25% of the labor force in Douglas. Table 4 presents the share of total resident-employment in town by industry. This data does not represent the number of jobs that are located in Douglas, but rather where the residents of Douglas find their employment.

TABLE 4 EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY	
2011-2015 ACS	
Industry	Percent
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	0.30%
Construction	8.60%
Manufacturing	12.20%
Wholesale trade	2.80%
Retail trade	14.90%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	4.30%
Information and finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	7.60%
Professional, scientific, management, and administrative and waste management services	12.90%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	25.30%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	4.30%
Other services (except public administration)	4.90%
Public administration	2.00%
Armed forces	0.00%

Residents in Douglas do enjoy a higher standard of living than other parts of the state as measured by the median household income. Douglas residents have also fared better than many of their neighbors. Incomes have grown at a steady rate and the population has increased, both despite the lingering effects of the economic downturn of 2006 to 2009. Douglas' economic position should be strong given the relative affluence and presumed purchasing power of its population as well as those of its neighbors.



Douglas's Economic Development Committee hosted a community visioning session. Through the session, the EDC sought to better understand Douglas residents' vision for economic growth. The feedback provided by residents will help guide the Town and EDC as they work to increase economic activity in Douglas, and implement the Town's future economic development plan.

Desired Assets and Amenities



In general, participants of the visioning session indicated they value Douglas's natural resources, lack of density, and peacefulness. Yet, a desire for local jobs, convenience goods, and other amenities is acutely felt. The Town lacks a supermarket and pharmacy. Options for dining and entertainment are perceived as limited. Large employers are in short supply. Small and home-based businesses lack connectedness and resources. Residents expressed a strong desire for such amenities, while emphasizing that development should be consistent with the Town's existing character. The priorities and strategies suggested by residents included:

Supermarkets

Douglas residents indicated that a supermarket is among their top priorities for new commercial business. Currently, most residents purchase groceries at Hannaford Supermarket in Uxbridge, Market Basket in Oxford, or Walmart in Sutton.

Pharmacy

Currently, residents must leave Town to access pharmacy goods and services. Prior efforts to attract a pharmacy indicate that Douglas's population may be too low to entice a pharmacy chain (based on previous discussions with site

selectors, the EDC estimates this figure is approximately 10,000 residents). While Douglas's population is not projected to reach 10,000 residents until 2040, Route 16 traffic counts may soon meet the population needs of typical pharmacy chain stores.

Entertainment

Participants expressed a desire for additional dining and entertainment options. Suggestions included cafes, bars, live music venues, brewpubs, licensed marijuana establishments, a bowling alley, a paintball park, and improved access to existing outdoor recreational amenities.

Small business amenities

Many small and home-based business owners participated in the community visioning session. These participants expressed a desire for greater connectivity between local businesses, as well as a desire for resources. Suggestions included a public place (e.g., a café) with operating hours consistent with remote working needs, co-working / shared office space, opportunities for networking, joint marketing, and a local business listing or guide to support business to business sales.

Recreation and outdoor tourism

Residents expressed a strong desire for expanded passive and active recreation opportunities, as well as economic development strategies that leverage such assets. Douglas State Forest comprises a significant portion of the Town and represents a significant asset. The 5,900 acre park borders Connecticut and Rhode Island, and attracts day-trippers from the tri-state area. In peak season, the park reaches maximum capacity early in the day, limiting access for Douglas residents. Strategies that provide greater access to Douglas residents while leveraging the Town's natural assets are desired. Suggested strategies include a ropes course, outdoor adventure company, or indoor family recreation facility. Douglas also contains a significant number of horse farms as well as the Southern New England Trunkline Trail. The Trunkline is one of the longest trails in Massachusetts and is popular among horse riders. Residents suggested pursuing strategies to link and promote Town's equestrian assets.

Arts and culture

Participants in the visioning session expressed a desire for additional cultural amenities. Beyond arts and cultural venues, resources to support artists and artisans are desired. Examples include makerspaces and artist live/work/exhibit space, such as AS220, a non-profit community arts organization located in downtown Providence, Rhode Island.

Employers

Residents indicated that the Town has limited opportunities for local employment, especially for younger workers. Indeed, Douglas is home to a limited number of large employers. Classic Envelope Inc., a company specializing in the production of envelopes and other packaging products, is the Town's largest employer, with between 100 and 250 employees. Outside of Douglas's public schools, the Town includes one (1) additional workplace that employs more than 50 workers, Guarantee Builders & Developers. (Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2018)

Additional needs

Residents expressed interest in a variety of other amenities, including Broadband internet, a business park, a late-night convenience store, public transit, a FedEx or UPS pickup/ shipping facility, and mixed-use development.

An economic development strategy that focuses on existing assets will maintain and enhance the Town's character and encourage such amenities. Given Douglas's growing population, proximity to several large cities, and existing assets, it is also a realistic strategy for economic growth. Yet, in Douglas, economic development is constrained by a limited supply of commercial and industrial land. New development must make the highest and best use of available sites. The following section summarizes participant feedback on key parcels.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND VISION

Action Items

Maintain Town Character and Help Existing Businesses

Provide support to new and home-based businesses and help home-based businesses locate commercial space. *Example: [Worcester's guidance for new businesses](#)*

Help business promote their goods and services by providing access to municipal platforms. *Example: [Cable Access - at the beginning of televised public meetings](#)*

Develop a user-friendly listing of local business-to-business purchasing opportunities. *Example: [Lexington, MA](#)*

Support collaborative capitalism. Encourage local businesses and community partners to organize and take part in "buy local" initiatives. *Example: [Central Mass Grown](#)*

Create marketing materials including an economic development website, town brochure or video, and economic development social media presence. *Example: [Quabbin Country](#)*

Develop and/or improve wayfinding along major thoroughfare routes and local and regional destinations. *Example: [Grants available from the Massachusetts Downtown Initiative](#)*

Increase Amenities Available to Residents/Visitors and Revitalize the Downtown Area

Consider adoption of Model Traditional Neighborhood Development Ordinance to encourage infill development in appropriate areas. *Example: [Model bylaw from the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission](#).*

Explore strategies for establishing a Business Improvement District in the Main Street Corridor. Communities are authorized to establish BIDs under [MGL Ch 400](#). *Example: [Amherst Business Improvement District](#).*

Make public spaces more attractive using flower boxes, appropriate fencing, and other landscaping. Implement a Downtown Facade Improvement program. *Grants available through [Main Street America](#)*

Explore options to improve parking in downtown, including a shared parking bylaw or parking benefits district (PBD). *Example: [Brookline, MA](#)*

Explore Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as a means of preserving open space and allowing density in select locations. *Example: [Falmouth, MA](#)*

Consider passing the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as a means of funding improvements in historic Main Street buildings. *Example: [Statewide CPA Map](#)*

Work with property owners to explore the re-use of any vacant space in commercial buildings. *[Resources from the Massachusetts Vacant Storefront Program](#).*



Market Analysis

Building on the feedback of residents and business owners, CMRPC conducted an analysis of development constraints. CMRPC examined the market supply and demand of various sectors, as well as the regulations and processes that affect development, including:

- Office, industrial, and retail real estate markets;
- Retail supply, demand, and leakage;
- Sports and leisure markets;
- Business zoning;
- Permitting and enforcement; and
- Other Town processes.

The analysis identified a potential unmet demand for industrial space, various retail, food, and drinking establishments, and sports and leisure businesses. Such businesses, as well as other amenities desired by residents, can be encouraged through adjustments to zoning, including mixed-use development provisions and clarifying areas of ambiguity, as well as permitting and procedural changes.



Office Space: As of December 2018, Douglas contained approximately 104,043 sq. ft. of vacant office space for a vacancy rate of 8.6 percent. The average number of months on the market for office space in 2018 was 17.9, up slightly from a five (5) year average of 15.8 months . Furthermore, the vacancy rate for office space increased in 2016, following an eight (8) year period of relative stability and low vacancy. The asking rent per sq. ft. increased at a slow but steady rate between 2011 and 2017, trending downward in 2018 (perhaps in response to the number of months on market). (CoStar, 2018) Compared to the Worcester-metro area, Douglas rental rates per sq. ft. remain low. With downward trends in a variety of indicators including asking rates, actual rental rates, and occupancy rates, the supply of office space in Douglas may be sufficient to meet current market demands. A detailed report on Office Space is available [here](https://cmrpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=a1d9efa18e9e48a487d470815d4d2afa&print).

MONTHS ON MARKET



Industrial Space: As of 2018, Douglas possessed approximately 109,914 sq. ft. of vacant industrial space. The vacancy rate has decreased steadily since peaking in 2010. In 2018, the Town saw approximately 800,000 sq. ft. in new industrial construction starts. The asking price per sq. ft. (rental) is slightly higher than the Worcester-metro area. In 2018, the median time on market was approximately 14 months, an improvement from the 5-year average of 18 months. (CoStar, 2018) With limited vacancies and declining vacancy rates, there may be a market demand for additional industrial space. A detailed report on Industrial Space is available [here](#).

VACANCY RATE





Retail Space: In 2018, the Douglas retail market had a vacancy rate of 2.2 percent, the equivalent of 56,680 sq. ft. Rental rates per sq. ft. were also down, from a high of \$21 per sq. ft. Additionally, The number of months on market for retail has decreased steadily since in 2014. (CoStar, 2018) A detailed report on the retail real estate market is available [here](#). Strategies that support adaptive reuse and mixed-use will help encourage new retail, food, and drinking establishments, areas which possess significant unmet demand.

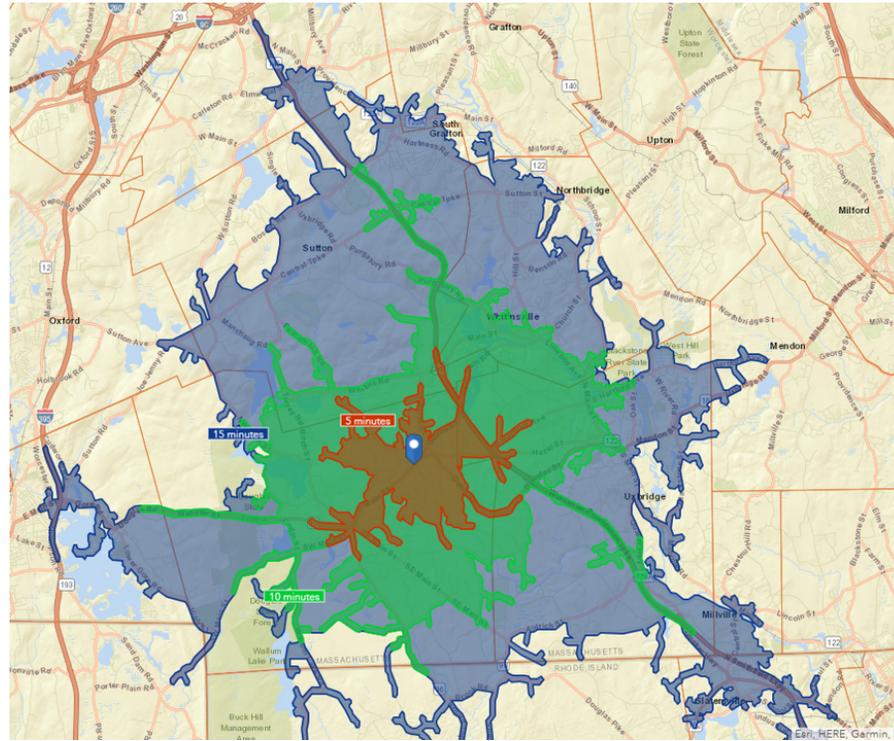


Transportation

Typically, retail supply and demand are measured based on drive times. On average, people are willing to drive ten (10) minutes to purchase convenience goods. Although this number varies depending on the person, the products, and other factors, ten-minute drive times are a standard measure of whether an area has everything its residents need for everyday living. Just as it is possible to predict how far most people will drive to pick up convenience goods, it is also possible to determine the amount of money people typically spend on items. If local stores are not selling a certain amount of a product, it is likely that residents are purchasing that item from a business outside of town. Generally, such "leakage" out of the local economy is the result of goods not being available at stores within town. High degrees of leakage can indicate that new businesses providing such goods within the trade area could be viable.

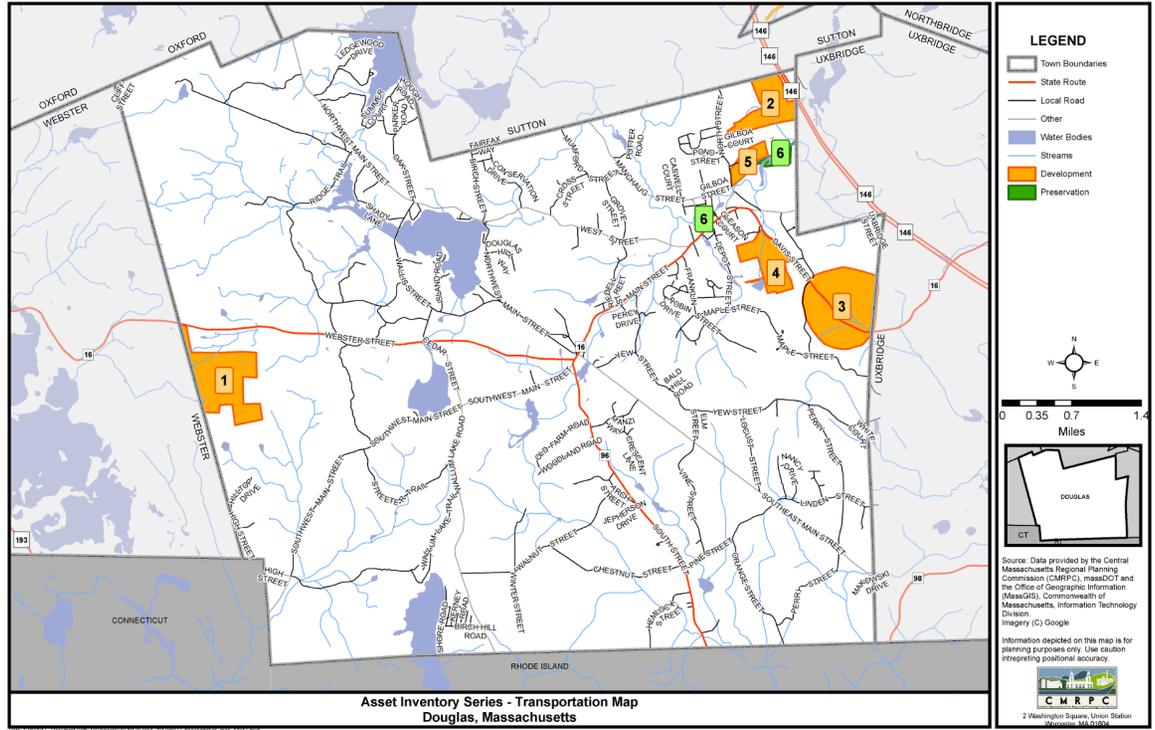
In Douglas, the 10-minute radius around Town Center contains estimated retail, food, and drink sales of \$232 million. The corresponding demand for such goods and services is estimated at \$275 million, indicating leakage to other communities in the amount of \$43 million. (ESRI Business Analytics, 2018) Several retail sectors have a supply that exceeds local demand. This indicates that some businesses are drawing customers from other trade areas; however, it is also an indicator that the local market may not support additional retailers of a similar type. Retail types experiencing greater supply than demand in Douglas include beer, wine, and liquor stores; department stores; electronic shopping and mail order houses; and direct selling establishments.

Business types highlighted in the community visioning session possess varying degrees of unmet demand. Food service and drinking places show a leakage of approximately \$15.5 million, while grocery stores have an unmet demand of approximately \$24 million. Health care and personal stores (e.g., pharmacies) have an unmet demand of \$13 million. Special food services and specialty food stores show an unmet demand of \$1 million and \$1.8 million, respectively. A variety of other retail types possess an unmet demand. (ESRI Business Analytics, 2018) A detailed report on Retail Supply, Demand, and Leakage is available [here](#).

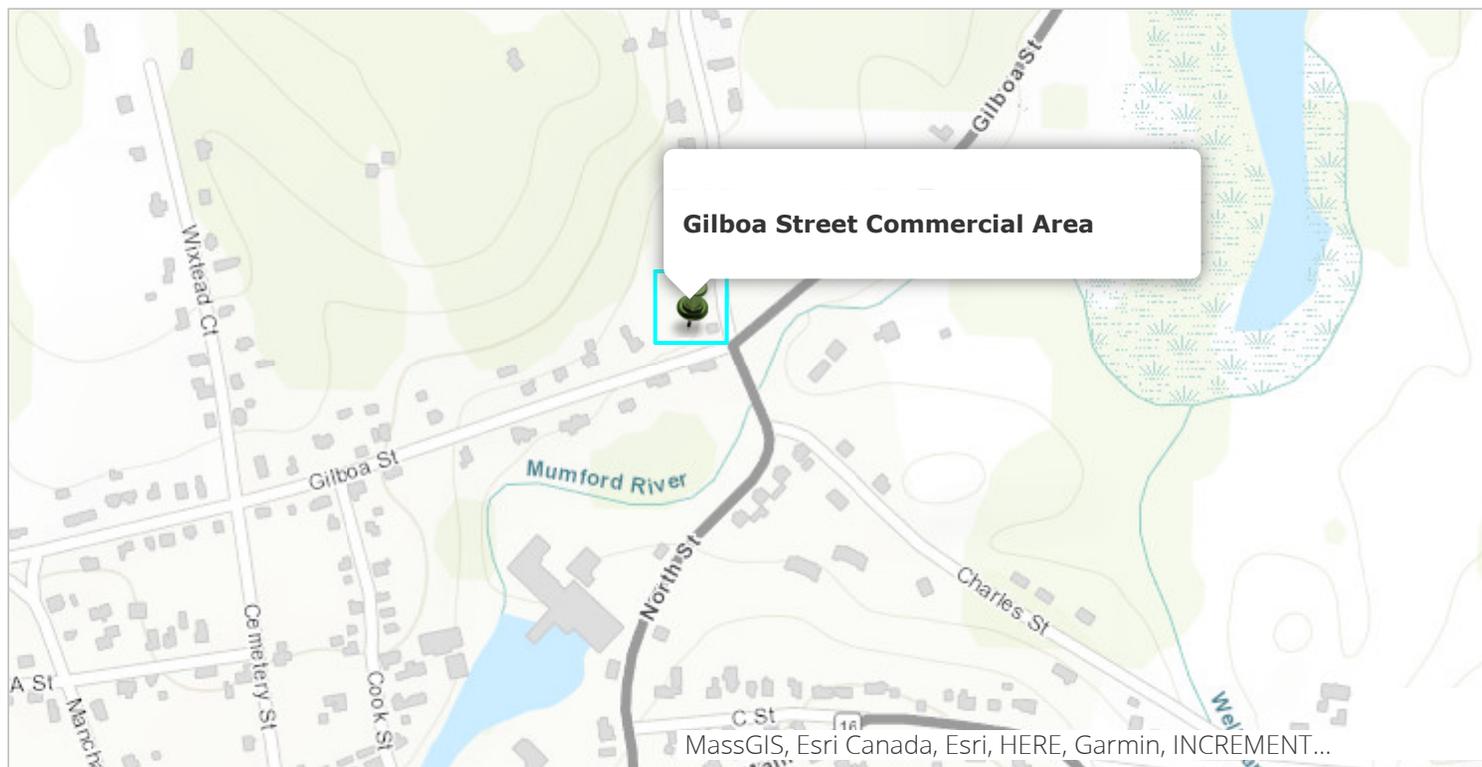


Drive times from the center of Town (ESRI Business Analyst)

When considering opportunities for development, it is essential to consider ease of access to major routes. Particular focus should remain on the East Douglas Priority Development Areas (PDAs). These parcels have the most direct access to Route 146, which feeds into Rhode Island to the South and provides access to Route 90 to the north. The figure below shows the main routes which grant access to Route 146. Parcels in PDA's 2 and 5 access the highway via Gilboa Street, while parcels in PDA's 4 and 3 access Route 146 via Davis Street. Douglas is connected to the regional transportation network via Route 16 which runs East-West between Route 146 and Route 395. This geographic position is a key advantage that Douglas should continue to use to its advantage.

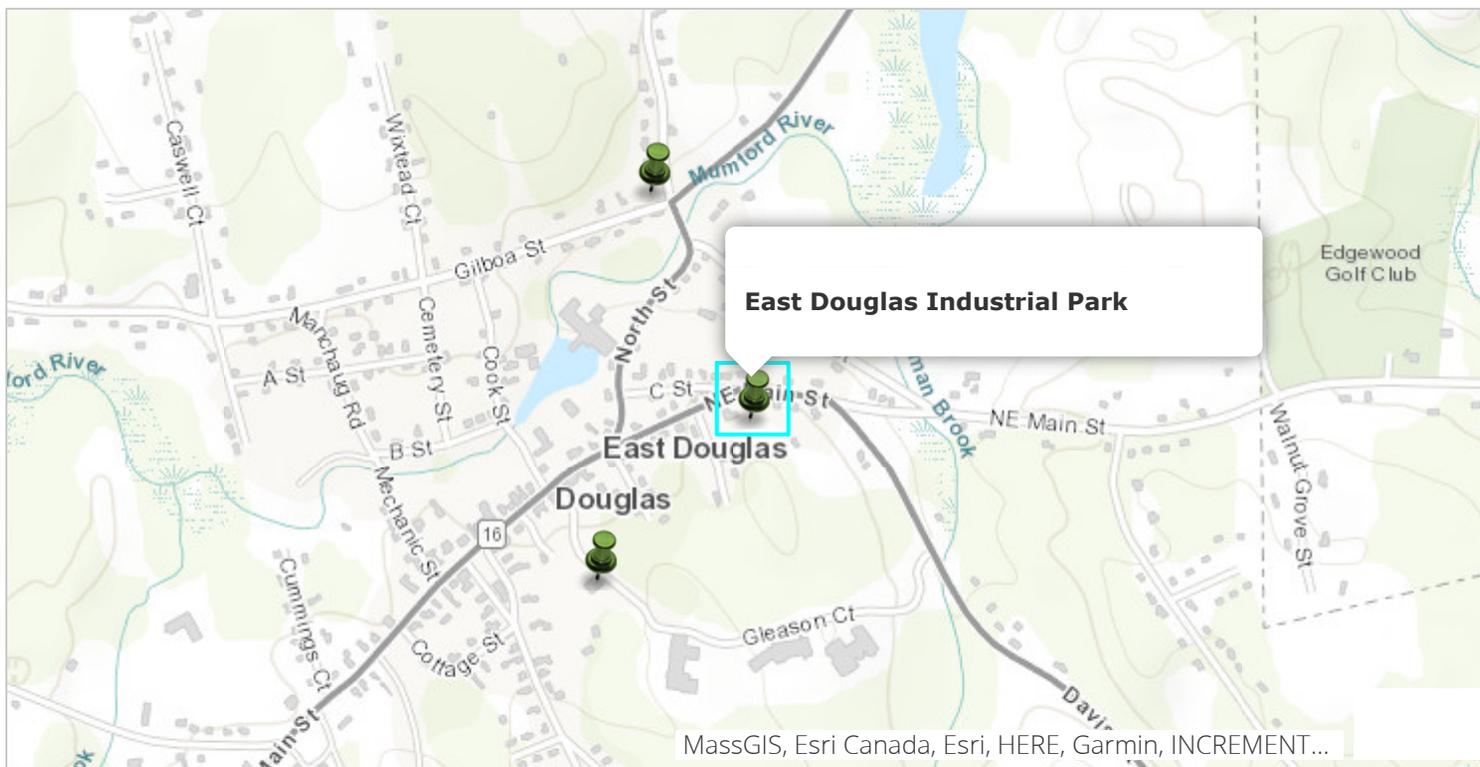


Locational Opportunities



With a limited amount of land suitable for new commercial and industrial uses, the highest and best use of key properties featured prominently into resident feedback. Discussion focused the following locations:

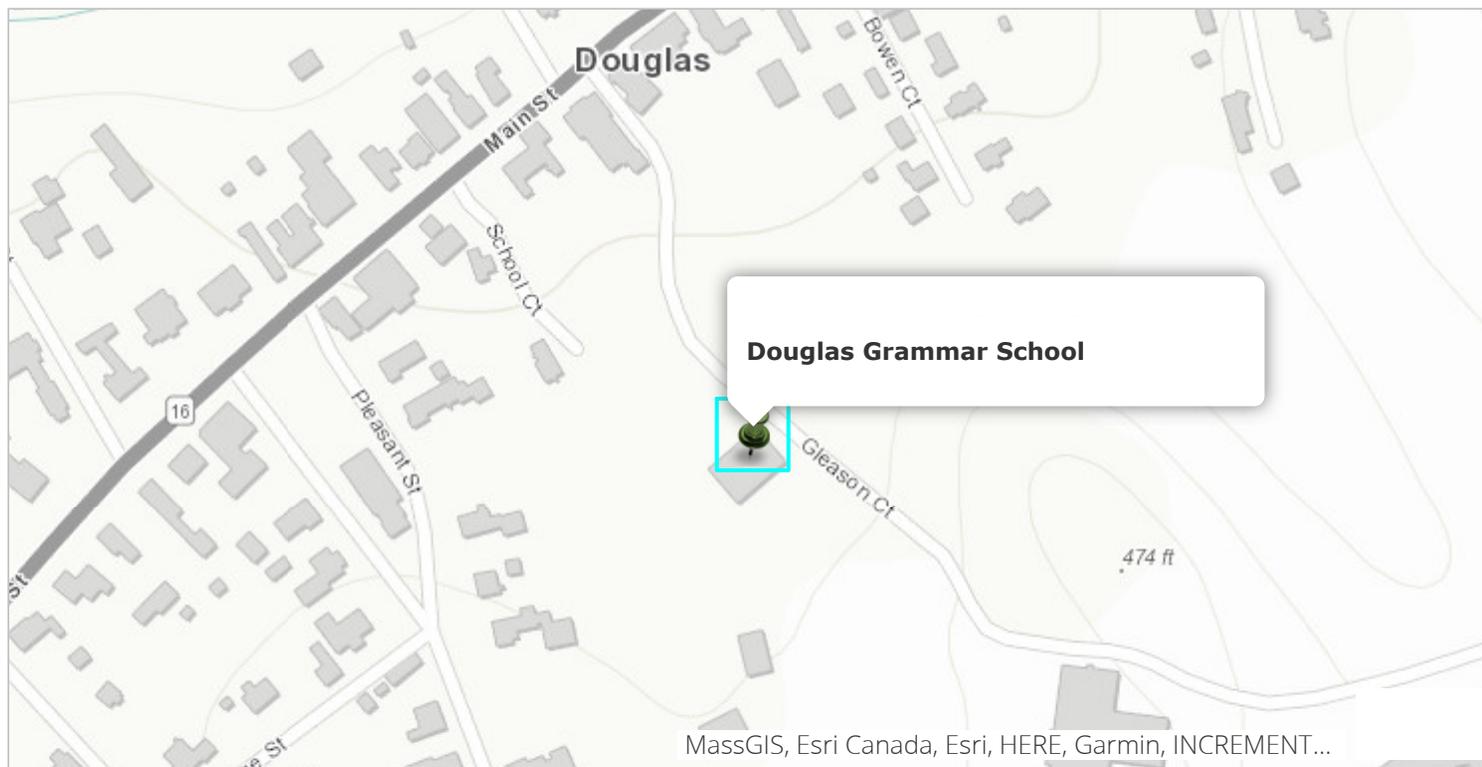
Gilboa Street Commercial Area: A local Priority Development Area (PDA), the Gilboa Street Commercial Area consists of approximately 12 acres, including the highly visible Gilboa Street/ North Street intersection. Participants indicated support for mixed-use development, potentially to include age-restricted residential units at a higher than usual density; a pharmacy; a grocery store; and other uses. Similar uses were discussed informally in 2004-2005 but were not advanced to the application stage.



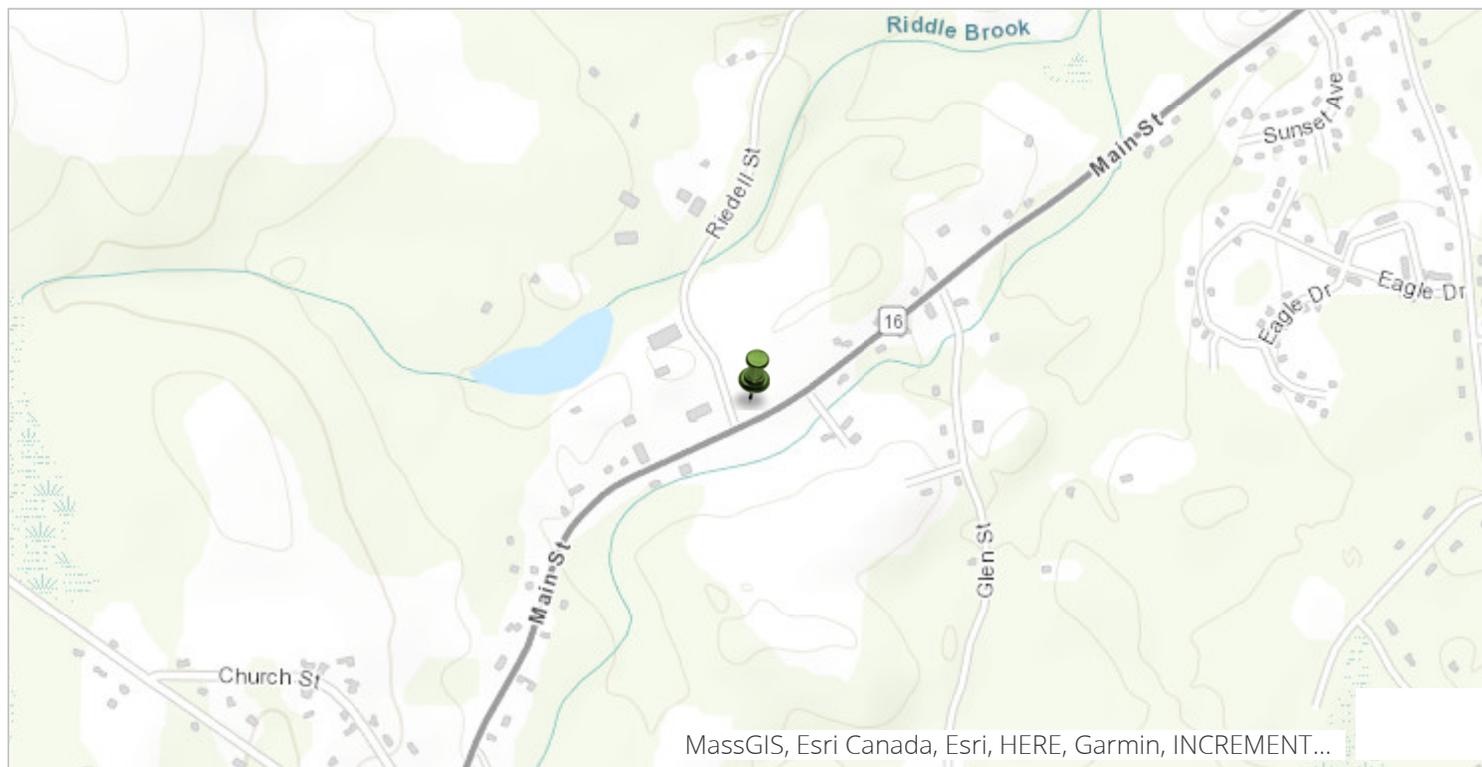
East Douglas Industrial Park: Located on Route 16 near the Uxbridge town line, the East Douglas Industrial Park site (PDA 77-3) consists of approximately 400 acres of developable land. Situated less than 0.25 miles from Route 146, the site benefits from excellent transportation access and can support development without impacting local traffic. The site consists of multiple owners, including the Town. Pockets of wetlands likely exist, especially in the front parcels. Development may require an easement across wetlands to access buildable, Town-owned backlots. Currently, the area is zoned Village Residential. Participants of the visioning session indicated that the property is ideally suited to a large industrial park or commercial facility, including a FedEx or UPS pickup/ shipping facility or warehouse. Additional research of environmental constraints is required. These conversations are underway.



Route 16/ Riedell Street Area: Commercially zoned and centrally located, the Route 16/ Riedell Street Area may be well-suited to commercial development. Currently, the area contains the Fire Station, Department of Public Works (DPW), and municipal transfer station. In 2018, the Town received an application to build a Dunkin Donuts in the area. Given its centrality and traffic count, the site may be well-suited to a grocery store. This centrality may increase the viability of such an establishment by limiting competition with supermarkets in nearby trade areas. The amount of developable land in the area is unknown.

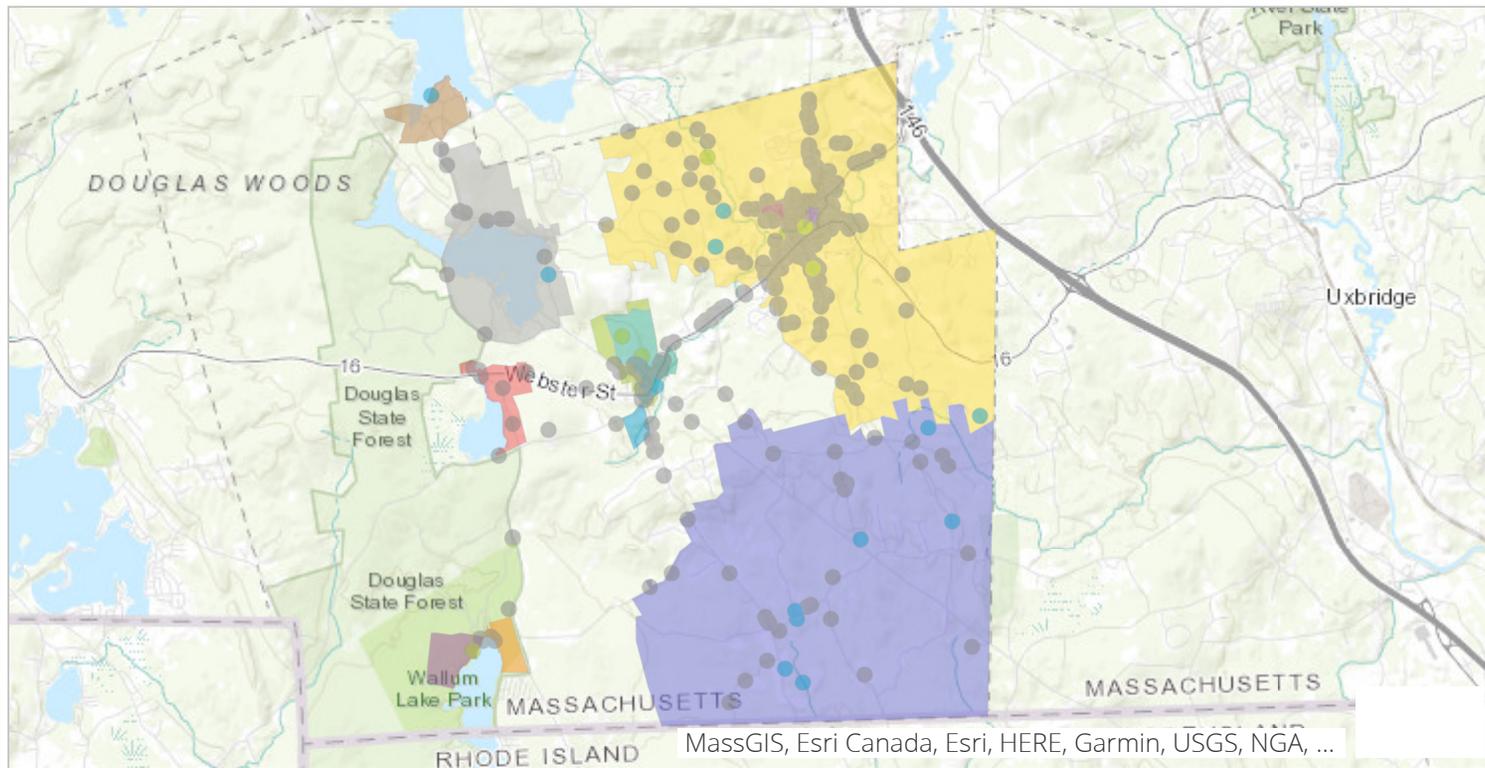


Douglas Grammar School: The Douglas Grammar School is a historic brick building located in Downtown Douglas. It has easy access to Routes 16, 146, and 395. It is located in the Town's Village Residential zoning district, which allows for a variety of uses By-Right and by Special Permit. The property enjoys the use of Town utilities (water and sewer) and has room for onsite parking. The two-story building is currently divided into eight (8) 850 sq. ft. rooms, four (4) rooms on each floor. The basement level and attic level also have the potential to provide usable space after renovation. Participants in the event envisioned adaptive reuses of the building, such as a 1st floor brewpub/ wine pub with a co-working or makerspace on the 2nd and 3rd stories.



Industrially-zoned land proximate to state forest: For several decades, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been purchasing property in Douglas and incorporating these parcels into the State Forest. In approximately 2014, the State acquired several hundred industrially-zoned acres in the Town's northwest quadrant and incorporated the parcels into the park. In the process, several key parcels became landlocked. Participants suggested the Town partner with the State to open these parcels to active, but minimally-invasive, recreation. Ropes and treetop courses were suggested as complementary to the recreational use of the State Forest, and outdoor recreation a desirable economic activity.

Gilboa Street 43-D: The Gilboa Street 43-D site (PDA 77-2) is a landlocked property located behind the Pyne Sand & Stone Co. (Pyne Sand). Zoned for industrial uses, the site's developability is contingent upon full excavation (and subsequent transfer/ easement provision) of the Pyne Sand property.



Historic Properties

Douglas is home to many historical assets and should work with its Historic Commission to utilize those assets fully. To view a listing of Douglas historic properties, [click here](#).

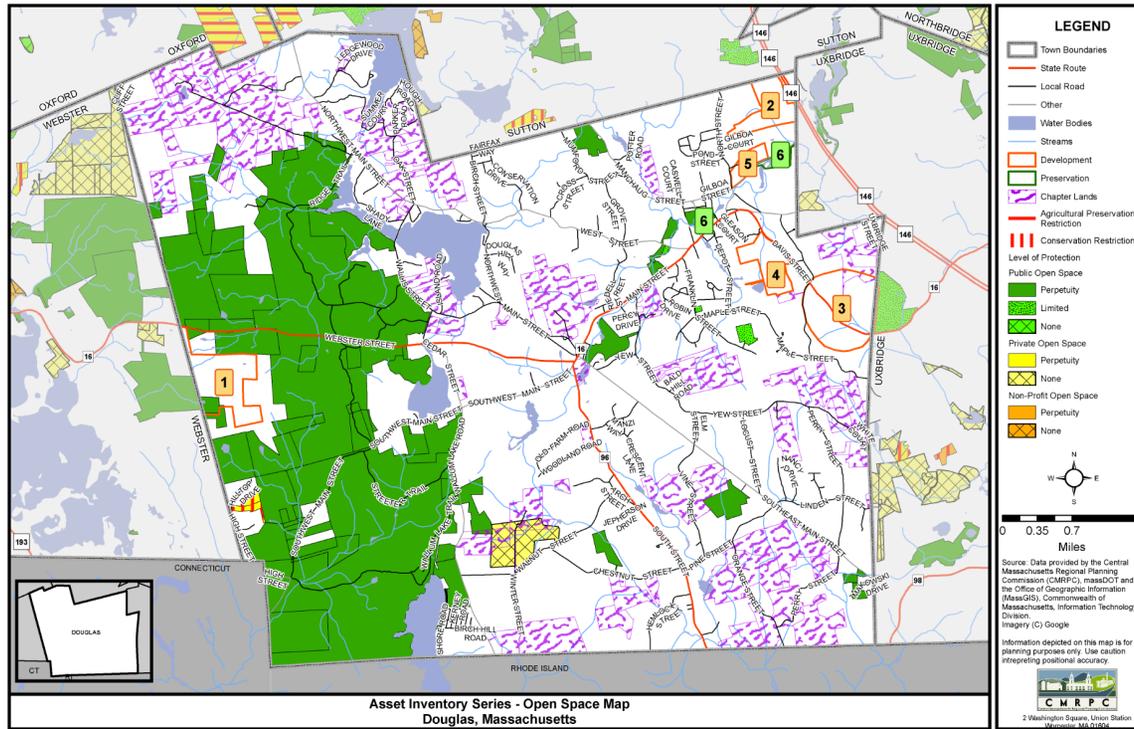
Legend

Douglas_Historic_Inventory_Points

- Structure
- Object
- Burial Ground
- Building

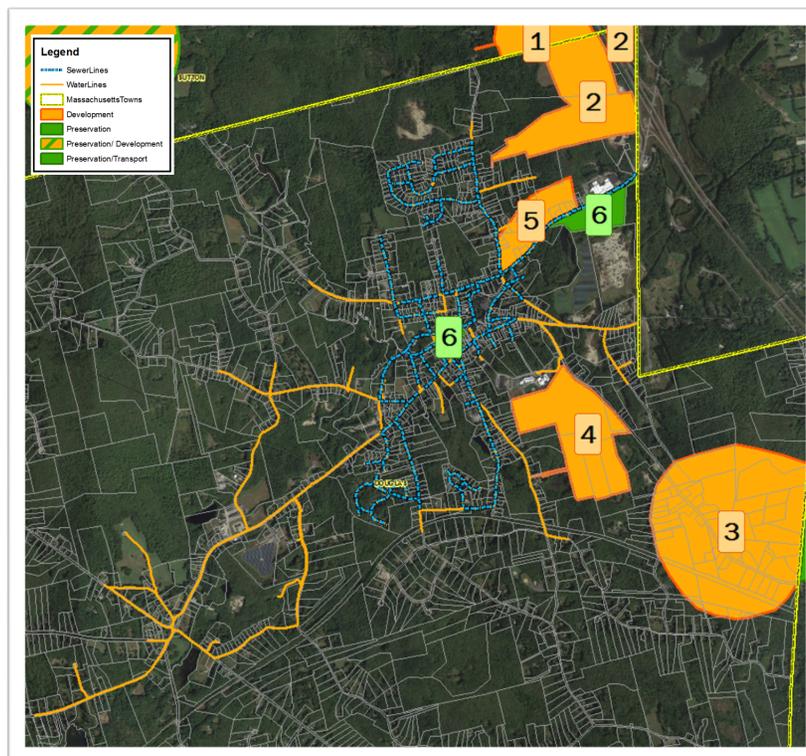
Douglas_Historic_Inventory_Areas

- ▢ Bad Luck Pond - Crystal Lake Area
- ▢ Douglas Camp Meeting Grounds
- ▢ Douglas Center
- ▢ Douglas State Forest - Wallum Lake Recreation Area
- ▢ Dyer Camps
- ▢ East Douglas
- ▢ Hayward Mill Historic District
- ▢ Manchaug Pond Area
- ▢ Old Douglas Center Historic District
- ▢ South Douglas
- ▢ Other



Open Spaces

Douglas is rich with natural and open space assets. The town hosts one of the largest state forests in the region, which attracts many visitors every year. Of the Town's open space, only 0.5% lacks full protection, while the remaining lands are permanently protected. Conversations with the Economic Development Committee and Town officials indicated numerous opportunities exist to leverage this resource. Of the options discussed, identifying locations for and barriers to lodging opportunities near the Douglas State Forest and increasing opportunities for year-round recreation in the area ranked highly. To view this Open Space Map, [click here](https://cmrpc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=a1d9efa18e9e48a487d470815d4d2afa&print).



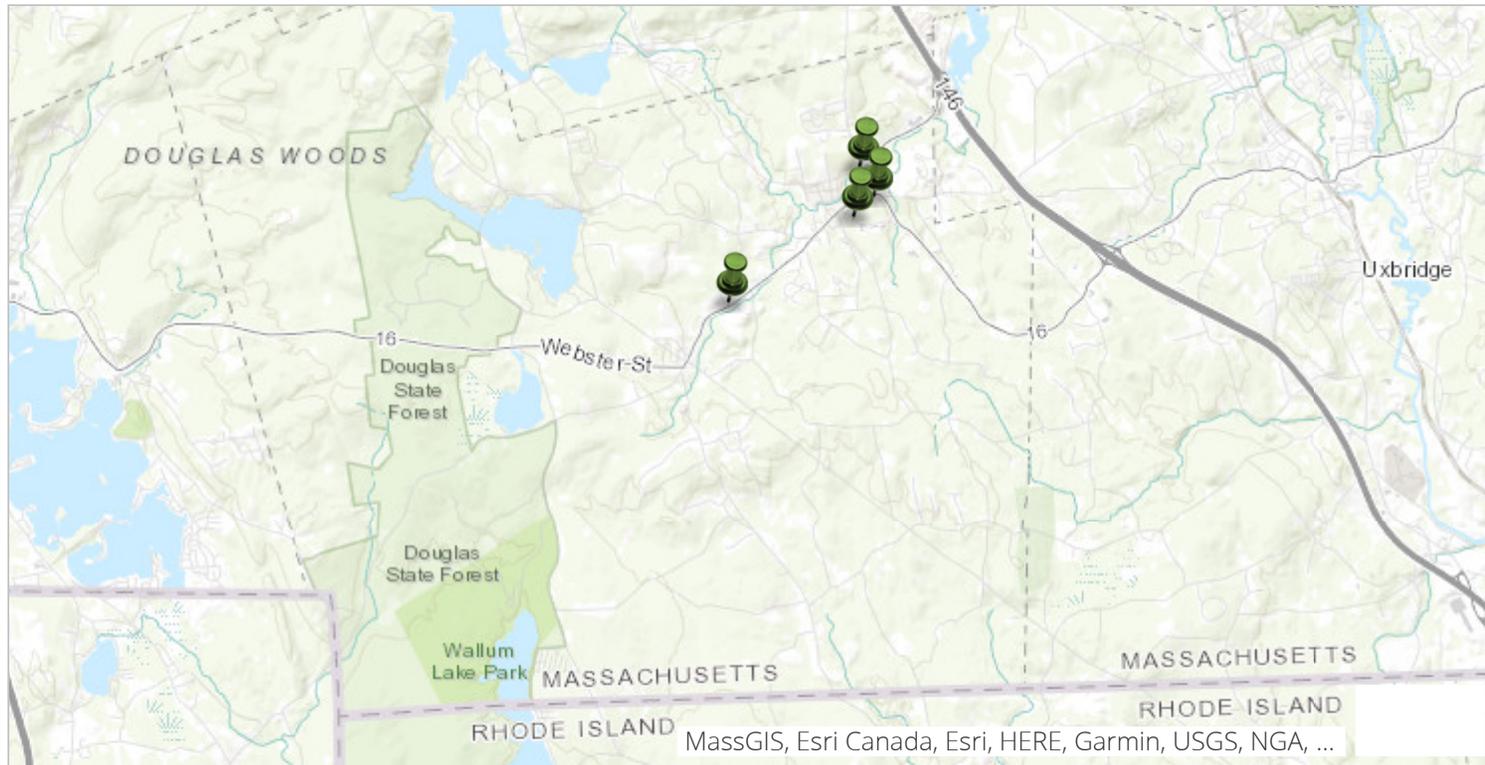
Utility Infrastructure

This Priority Development Area map identifies the following important areas, parcels, and other sites:

1. Douglas Commercial Park
2. Gilboa Street - 43D site
3. East Douglas Industrial Park
4. Davis Street
5. Gilboa Street Commercial Area
6. Mumford Riverfront

Douglas is not served by natural gas, and water and sewer service are limited. A 20-inch natural gas pipeline runs along the border of Town, and may provide an opportunity for local gas service. Neighboring communities have demonstrated some interest in expanding gas service to the Douglas border; however, expanding services across Route 146 presents significant challenges. Route 16 frontage lots would be an ideal location for development; however such lots are underserved by water and sewer. Similarly, the Pyne Sand site has sewer service but lacks the water capacity for major development. Support for expanding water and sewer service is limited due to the cost of new infrastructure. In

the near-term, the Town may be best served by ensuring that areas with adequate water and sewer capacity are zoned to support development. Existing water and sewer infrastructure is primarily located near the town center.



The locations on this map represent high-impact opportunities for the Town. Their development or adaptive reuse will support residents' long-term vision for their community. This vision, as defined by participants in the community visioning session, synthesizes the priorities detailed in previous sections with other quality of life elements, providing an aspirational framework for development.

LOCAL ASSET DEVELOPMENT Action Items

Enhance Commercial Base of Eco-Tourism

Create a shared events calendar coordinate branding, marketing and cultural event activities. Example: [Spencer, MA](#)

Promote and encourage participation in regional tours and trails to bolster the local economy using a symbiotic strategy. Example: [MA Department of Agriculture Craft Breweries Map](#)

Explore hosting more large-scale outdoor events such as road or boat races, competitions, and anything else recreational that would bring in visitors and improve familiarity of the region. Example: [Spartan Race in Rutland, MA](#)

Take Advantage of Existing Priority Development Areas and Other Assets

Seek clarification of environmental and site assembly constraints at the East Douglas Industrial Park site.

Utilize Tax Increment Finance (TIF) and other development incentives to encourage development. Example: [Leominster, MA](#)

Widely market vacant and available properties; consider traditional platforms as well as social media and emerging online tools. Example: [Vacant Storefront Best Practices in Cambridge, MA](#)

Identify how much land is available for development in the Route 16/ Riedell Street Area.

Maintain an inventory of vacant commercial and industrial sites so the Town can match vacant sites with businesses looking to open.

Seek clarification from the owner of Pyne Sand on time frame for complete excavation of the property.



Douglas employs a number of economic development best practices. The Town's development staff and boards were consolidated into a single department (the Community Development Department) in 2000. The Department comprises the Building Facilities and Construction Committee, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Commission, Open Space Committee, Planning Board, and Zoning Board of Appeals. Department staff includes the Town Engineer, the Conservation / Planning Agent, and an Administrative Assistant. Collectively, these staff and volunteers help project applicants navigate the state and local permitting processes. The Department also helps board members, project abutters, and the public understand the permitting process and their various roles. "Since the creation of the Department communication and coordination between the various departments on projects has significantly improved and results in a streamlined permitting process for the project applicant." (Town of Douglas, 2019)

The Community Development Department also convenes pre-development conferences for certain projects. "Tech Review" is also available upon request from developers. Standing Tech Review is a favorite tool of economic development practitioners (and developers), as it tends to generate more favorable and complete applications, improve transparency and communications, and expedite permitting.

In conjunction with pre-development conference/ Tech Review, the Town utilizes combined permitting. This process allows the combination of multiple Special Permit and/or site plan approval applications into a single application and requires a single public hearing. Another best practice, this tool can decrease permitting time frames and promote a community as business friendly.

Douglas also utilizes a permitting guide that outlines development processes. The Town should continue to maintain and update the development guide, and make it available on the Town's website. In complement, Douglas should consider implementing online permitting software. This would improve customer access, facilitate communication between boards and departments, and automate tracking and record-keeping. This would be a major step in improving efficiency in the permitting process.

Despite implementing combined permitting, tech review, and other measures, Douglas retains an image of being difficult to do business in. The municipal employees noted that the speed and effectiveness of the permitting process hinges upon the completeness and regulatory compliance of applications. As in other communities, inefficiencies and delays arise when applications are submitted without all required components, or do not meet local, State, or Federal regulations. However, the Town suffers from a perception that its wetlands bylaws are more stringent than required by the State. According to Town staff, this perception is inaccurate in present day. In the early 2000s, Douglas experienced a surge of new development. During this period, a significant number of permits were denied by the Conservation Commission. In recent years, the Town has issued very few denials; however, the belief that Douglas's Conservation Commission is unduly strict remains.

MUNICIPAL SUPPORT AND EFFICIENCY Action Items

Build Municipal Capacity for Economic Development and Planning

Hire a part-time economic development staff or full-time planner with economic development skills to enhance responsive and proactive economic development functions. Work with CMRPC to identify inter-municipal job-sharing opportunities, and pursue pilot grants. Example: [Efficiency and Regionalization Grant Program](#)

Track business leads. In many towns, business leads fall through the cracks if a suitable site is not readily available.

Ensure the Town website is up-to-date with relevant documents, regulations, etc.

Conduct outreach to ensure existing businesses feel supported and have the resources to thrive (and expand) in Douglas.

Spearhead and work with a local business association that can assist with business networking, the creation of joint marketing materials, and help the town connect and market its outdoor and equestrian assets. Example: [The Lakeway Business District Association](#)

Seek leads from the Chamber of Commerce, commercial real estate brokers, and state agencies. Example: [Blackstone Valley Chamber](#)

Collaborate with newspapers and other media outlets to promote new businesses.

Take Steps to Promote Municipal Efficiency and Transparency

Formalize standing pre-development conferences open to prospective business owners at any stage of development. Even if there isn't a developer present, these meetings are useful for staff communication.

The Town may also want to consider exempting projects of limited scale and complexity from Site Plan Review, and utilize pre-development conference/ Tech Review for all projects over a certain size.

Implement online permitting software to increase efficiency and access to information. Example: [Littleton, MA](#)

Maintain and update the development guide that outlines the process that developers should follow.

Consider additional training for municipal boards and committees that engage with developers. Example: [Citizen Planner Training Collaborative](#)



Zoning is an essential tool for shaping development. Beyond what uses are allowed, where they are allowed, and how they are otherwise regulated, zoning presents an opportunity to express a vision for development. As shown in Figure 9 (below), the Town of Douglas contains eight (8) base zoning districts:

Residential

- Rural Agricultural (RA)
- Village Residential (VR)
- Residential Commercial One (RC1)
- Residential Commercial Two (RC2)

Business

- Central Business (CB)
- Commercial (C)

Industrial

- Industry (I)

Open Space

- State Forest Open Space (SFOS)

makerspaces, artisan manufacturing, commercial kitchens, and other shared production environments can further encourage their development and support on-site producers.

- **Mixed-use Commercial/Residential:** Currently, mixed-use commercial/residential development is not defined in zoning bylaw. Under certain conditions, this may be a suitable By-Right (or Special Permit) use in the VR zoning district. Potential conditions which may warrant By-Right use include: a) the property has frontage on a main street, or b) the design meets Village Center or Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) standards. Mixed-use development can be further encouraged by providing reduced parking standards, especially for the residential components of development.
- **Vertical Mixed-Use:** Vertical Mixed-Use Structures are defined as a single building designed to encourage a diversity of compatible land uses which include a mixture of two (2) or more of the following uses: residential, office, retail, or personal services, with the ground floor used primarily for non-residential use. To ensure mixed-use development is consistent with the existing character of Douglas, the Town may want to add a definition of Vertical Mixed-Use Development to its Zoning Bylaws, state a preference for this development style therein, provide for appropriate dimensional regulations, and amend the Use Table to include it as an allowed use in the VR district.
- **Retail Uses:** Participants expressed interest in a grocery store, pharmacy, and Licensed Marijuana Establishments.
- **Grocery stores and small markets:** Residents expressed a desire for more options for food shopping, including small grocers, specialty stores, and supermarkets. Currently, grocery stores and supermarkets are not explicitly defined in the Zoning Bylaws. Presumably, these uses fall under Retail establishments for the sale of merchandise to the general public not otherwise set forth herein, henceforth referred to as Other Retail, which is allowed By-Right in C and CB districts. In all other zoning districts, these uses require a Special Permit (except RA and SFOS, where they are prohibited). As Other Retail, small single goods establishments (bakeries, butcher-shops, etc.) are allowed by Special Permit in the Village Residential (VR) district; however, the zoning lacks a mixed-use provision. In today's marketplace, fewer developers are building new, small scale single-use buildings; a mixed-use option could encourage development suitable for multiple smaller retail uses.
- **Pharmacies:** Pharmacies were also highlighted as a needed amenity. Given the aging population of the Town and the region, pharmacies are expected to be a strong growth sector. Locally sited pharmacies can help minimize the amount of driving elderly residents need to do and increase the likelihood of being able to age into their community. Pharmacies are not explicitly defined in the Zoning Bylaws, although this use might fall under Other Retail. This use could be made more explicit, and allowed By-Right in select areas (the C and CB districts are best suited to). A small-scale drug store could be well-suited to Town Center, consistent with the area's historic uses. A medium to large-scale pharmacy could be well-suited to the Gilboa Street Commercial Area or Route 16/ Riedell Street Area, as noted in the community visioning session.
- **Service and Hospitality Uses:** Douglas residents expressed a strong desire for service and hospitality amenities, including a variety of dining, entertainment, and social/ cultural options, especially located in Downtown. Encouraging these amenities will help establish Douglas as a destination and enhance the vibrancy of Downtown.
- **Brew pubs, breweries, wineries, and bars:** These uses are not explicitly defined in the zoning bylaw. Provided such establishments sell food, they might fall under the category of Restaurants. In such case, they would be allowed in the

C, CB, and I districts By-Right and in the RC-1 and RC-2 districts by Special Permit. Modern micro-breweries do not seem to be allowed in any commercial districts based on current Use Table. This use could be interpreted as manufacturing, which is allowed in the I district By-Right and in the RC-1, RC-2, and C districts by Special Permit. If the Town wants to encourage such uses, they should be explicitly identified and defined in the zoning bylaw. The Town might also consider allowing such uses By-Right in the C (and possibly CB) districts, as brewpubs and similar establishments include a service component.

- **Bowling alleys and other non-food entertainment:** Such uses fall under “Commercial indoor amusement,” which is permitted by special permit in the RC-1, RC-2, C, CB, and I districts. Given the variability in commercial indoor amusement, allowing these uses by Special Permit (as they are currently), rather than By-Right is advisable.
- **Restaurants:** Permitted By-Right in the C, CB, and I districts and by Special Permit in the RC-1 and RC-2 districts, Douglas’s zoning encourages the development of new restaurants in areas consistent with the Town’s land use patterns. The Town may want to consider allowing restaurants in the VR district by Special Permit.
- **Hotels:** Residents did not express a desire for additional lodging amenities; however, the outdoor tourism strategies they suggested call for overnight accommodations. Moreover, converting day-trippers into short-stay vacationers presents an opportunity for spillover business. Currently, this use is allowed By-Right in the CB district and by Special Permit in the RC-1, RC-2, and C districts. The Town might consider amending the zoning to allow hotels By-Right in the C district, and by Special Permit in the VR district.
- **Bed and Breakfasts:** Currently, the Zoning Bylaws do not allow By-Right development of Bed and Breakfasts in any district. They are allowed by Special Permit in all but the I district. The Town might want to consider allowing Bed and Breakfasts By-Right in RC1 or RC2 under certain conditions.

Other Uses: Residents expressed a desire for additional cultural and recreational opportunities.

- **Theater/ cultural uses:** Such uses are not explicitly defined in the Zoning Bylaws. To encourage such uses, the Town should define and provide for them in the zoning. Best practices to encourage theatres and other cultural uses include allowing performance spaces and rehearsal halls of up to 20,000 sq. ft.
- **Artist live/work housing:** To encourage artist live/work housing, this use should be clearly defined and provided for in the Zoning Bylaws.
- **Pop-up retail ordinance:** To encourage arts and cultural amenities, the Town may wish to adopt a pop-up retail ordinance that allows and streamlines temporary uses, especially in Downtown. Temporary uses allow storefronts to remain active in the absence of long-term tenants. Common temporary uses include art galleries, seasonal retail, pilot businesses, and cause-based uses.
- **Outdoor recreation (e.g. zip lines, ropes course):** Such uses fall under “Public or private outdoor recreation use,” which is allowed By-Right in the SFOS district and by Special Permit in the R-A, RC-1, and RC-2 districts. Continuing to allow this use By-Right in the SFOS district will support residents’ desire for additional outdoor recreation activities in the industrially-zoned land proximate to the State Forest. The Town may also wish to consider adding this as a Special Permit use in the I district.

ZONING Action Items

Align Bylaws and Other Regulations with Community's Vision

Above all, zoning bylaws should clearly articulate the purpose and intention of each district. They must also ensure that desirable uses are adequately defined and provided for in the Zoning Bylaw, preferably By-Right.

Define and address coworking spaces, makerspaces, and industrial/office "flex" space within the Zoning Bylaws. This may include similar uses such as small-scale artisan manufacturing, shared commercial kitchens, and even allowing an attached retail component to such spaces.

Assess the suitability of allowing mixed-use commercial/residential development By-Right in the VR Zoning District. The Town may also want to address Vertical Mixed-Use Development.

Pharmacies are not explicitly defined in the Zoning Bylaws but should perhaps be allowed By-Right in selected areas (typically C and CB districts) as they were highlighted as a potential opportunity by the market analysis and community meeting.

Brew pubs, breweries, wineries, and bars are also not explicitly defined in the Zoning Bylaw. To encourage their development, the town should address them and consider allowing such uses in the C (and possibly CB) districts.

The Town might want to consider allowing Bed & Breakfasts By-Right in RC1 or RC2 under certain conditions.

Additional uses that should be defined in the Zoning Bylaw include Theaters/Cultural Uses as well as Artist live/work housing.

Outdoor recreation is allowed By-Right in the R-A, RC-1, and RC-2 districts. The Town should consider adding this as a Special Permit use in the I district to further encourage this desirable use.

Consider revising Site Plan Regulations to exempt projects of limited scale and complexity.

Consider passing a pop-up retail ordinance to allow and streamline temporary uses such as art galleries, seasonal retail, and pilot businesses.

Consider adopting Design Guidelines.

Identify whether local regulations (especially those pertaining to conservation) are more stringent than required by the State.



This report has consolidated findings from a community visioning process and a constraints analysis into a comprehensive action plan. To view a printable Action Items Implementation Matrix, [click here](#).

